

**Testimony on
Chronic Wasting Disease**

delivered by

**The Honorable Scott McCallum
Governor of the State of Wisconsin**

before a joint oversight hearing of the

House Resources Subcommittees on

Forests and Forest Health

and

Fisheries Conservations, Wildlife and Oceans

May 16, 2002

1310 Longworth House Office Building

9:30 a.m.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and members of this subcommittee for holding a hearing on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), a disease that I believe is the most serious wildlife disease we've ever faced. I am joined today by Darrell Bazzell, Wisconsin's Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Jim Harsdorf, Wisconsin's Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Now that Dr. Miller has done an excellent job laying out the basics of the disease, I and my colleagues from the great states of Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska will attempt to describe how this disease is causing serious problems in our states. CWD presents the same very serious threat to all of us, but each state has its own unique challenges to deal with. I would like to share with you a Wisconsin perspective.

What's at risk?

The concern about CWD from a national perspective took a quantum leap when we learned on February 28th that it had been found in our state. It was a very sad day for us. To gain a full understanding of what I mean by that you need to learn a little about our state.

Although we are probably best known as America's Dairyland, a producer of great cheeses, and the home of

the Green Bay Packers, we are also one of the top 3 deer states in the country. Wisconsinites cherish the scenic beauty of our state. The white-tailed deer is an integral part of that beauty. It is also our state wildlife animal. I'm not exaggerating when I say that for many in my state, the quality of their life is greatly affected by the health of the deer herd. In the fall of 2000, hunters in our state harvested 619,000 deer. This is the highest annual harvest of white-tailed deer ever recorded by any state in the country. In addition to our great wild deer herds, we have nearly 1,000 deer and elk farms in Wisconsin. We are among the nation's leading producers of farm-raised venison. Deer contribute over 1 billion dollars to Wisconsin's economy. We have a lot at risk and, quite simply, chronic wasting disease is threatening our way of life in Wisconsin. Because of this, I have set a state goal of eradicating CWD from Wisconsin if at all possible. We need your help if we are to do so.

The Wisconsin Battleground

- Wisconsin brings a whole new set of concerns to the CWD battleground. We are the easternmost state to find the disease in the wild and we have white-tailed deer that seem to be the most susceptible of the species known to contract CWD. Perhaps the biggest concern is the scale of the issues we are dealing with.

Wisconsin's wild and farmed deer herds, as with most states, have undergone great growth in the last 40 years. Over the last 10 years, our fall population of wild deer has averaged nearly 1.5 million animals. Our annual deer harvest is larger than the combined deer and elk harvest from Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota. Our 1,000 deer and elk farms are raising approximately 30,000 animals. As you can see we have a very large at-risk population of animals in our state and left unchecked CWD seems certain to spread across our state.

We have responded quickly as a state since February 28th. In April, our Agriculture Department adopted new, stringent rules that prohibit the importing of captive cervids that haven't been participating in a CWD monitoring program for 5 years. We are also requiring testing for all our deer and elk farms where animals leave the farm, dead or alive. That same month, we collected more than 500 deer from the CWD-infected area to better determine the location and prevalence of the disease in southwest Wisconsin.

It is important that we all understand that CWD is the enemy here and to treat the disease, we must take drastic action. We are recommending the depopulation of the wild deer herd within a 300-square mile-eradication zone where we have identified CWD-positive deer. We estimate that prior to fawns being born this month, there are nearly 15,000 deer to be removed.

This week, Department of Natural Resource's staff began removing deer on state-owned land. Shortly, we will begin to issue deer removal permits to willing landowners to shoot deer to lower the population on private property. This fall, we will offer unprecedented, extended gun deer seasons and bag limits to allow hunters to take all the deer they can. Finally, we will offer state-assisted deer removal to landowners, if they desire.

We are working on a landscape that is nearly all privately owned. Without landowner and hunter cooperation in fighting CWD, our efforts will fail. Fortunately, the majority of landowners so far have indicated a willingness to help. This will be a long battle. If we can lower the deer herd to a point where CWD can't sustain itself, we may need to keep the deer herd at this level for 3-5 years. This is a tremendous sacrifice for local landowners and it will be a very costly project for the state.

We are also trying to lower the population in the 13 deer management units surrounding the eradication zone by 50-75%. This would require a deer harvest of nearly 100,000 additional deer.

How can the federal government help?

As I said earlier, we will need your help in fighting CWD. Much like a major forest fire, CWD can overwhelm the disease fighting resources of a single state. We do need your financial assistance. In the roughly 80 days since we discovered CWD in Wisconsin, our state has spent \$600,000 in responding.

This week I called our state legislature into special session to approve \$4 million dollars in emergency state funding and helpful statutory changes to fight the disease.

Nearly two months ago, I sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman asking for \$18 million in federal assistance over the next four years. Today, I would like your assurance that the federal government will provide grants to the states that are on the front lines fighting CWD. Wisconsin will do everything it can to help prevent CWD from spreading to other mid-western states.

The second area where we need immediate and comprehensive federal assistance is the diagnostic testing for CWD. Simply put, the total lab capacity in the country cannot match the testing needs we have in Wisconsin alone. The CWD surveillance testing needs for Wisconsin over the next 12 months exceeds 60,000 animals. This figure, which is likely not achievable, includes testing deer from the eradication zone, the surrounding 13 deer management units, and surveying as much of the rest of the state as we can handle. If we add the testing desired for food safety reasons, the number increases dramatically.

Dr. Miller indicated that CWD is a disease of perception in terms of the human health risk. I couldn't agree more. It is comforting that CWD has not yet been documented to cause human illness and that the CWD prions have not been found in venison. However, the specter of Mad Cow disease in Britain, and the recommendation from the World Health Organization that no one eat meat from a CWD positive animal, causes concern in a large portion of the public. We have more than 700,000 deer hunters in Wisconsin. If just 15% of them request to have their deer tested for CWD, it will add more than 100,000 deer to the equation.

Currently, Wisconsin has no in-state testing capacity, but we are moving quickly to change that. We are investing \$900,000 in our Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, to allow us to run the gold standard CWD test. We are also taking steps to prepare for the new rapid CWD tests when they are available. With luck, we may be running some tests by early summer. We need USDA APHIS assistance to provide training to our employees and to provide all the needed approvals to add our laboratory to the seven existing labs within the national CWD system.

We also have several private labs in Wisconsin poised to invest large sums of money and energy to meet the needs of Wisconsin's hunters who want their deer tested. Deer season starts September 14 and much work needs to be done in the next 120 days if they are to offer testing. These private labs need a decision this month on whether USDA will allow CWD testing to be done by them, and if so, under what requirements. This is a fundamental question for our state.

I urge USDA to find a way to constructively harness the energy of private enterprise in the war on CWD. If confidence in the safety of venison falls and causes deer hunters not to participate in the gun deer season, it will have many negative consequences. First and foremost, the growth of the herd will have negative impacts on agriculture, native vegetation and vehicle-deer collisions.

The federal government could also act as a clearinghouse or repository of critical CWD information for access by states and the general public. For example, the disposal of carcasses from CWD-infected areas has received a lot of discussion in Wisconsin. I suspect the federal agencies have already addressed this issue and could save states a lot of time if they shared their analysis.

Finally, there are many key and basic research questions about CWD that we need help answering. How does the transmission of CWD occur? Is CWD contamination of the environment a key factor? Does CWD act the same in white-tailed deer as in mule deer or elk?

As we develop a national CWD strategy, we must realize that we can't protect the deer and elk farms of our country without protecting our wild herds of deer and elk. To protect our wild herds, we must protect the captive herds. We need a comprehensive approach.

I will close by thanking you for holding this hearing and giving me the chance to represent Wisconsin's CWD needs. I also want to say thank you to APHIS for all the cooperation we have already received from both the Veterinary and Wildlife Services branches of your agency. Your Wisconsin offices have done everything they can to help us combat CWD.

Attachments:

Additional Wisconsin CWD Informational Documents

1. Map of CWD eradication zone and surrounding CWD management zone.
2. Map of where CWD testing has occurred in Wisconsin.
3. Map of deer and elk farms in Wisconsin.
4. Request to Secretary Veneman for financial assistance.
5. CWD Research Priorities

Attachment 1

Map of CWD eradication zone and surrounding CWD management zone

Attachment 2

Map of where CWD testing has occurred in Wisconsin



Attachment 3
Map of deer and elk farms in Wisconsin



March 19, 2002

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
Room 200A, Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I am requesting your assistance in obtaining the immediate release of money from the appropriate emergency funds to enable the State of Wisconsin to respond effectively to Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), which has been diagnosed in free-ranging white-tailed deer in southwestern Wisconsin.

The primary workload will fall upon the Wisconsin Departments of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Natural Resources (DNR) and Health and Family Services (DHFS). These agencies have responsibility to protect the health of domestic animals including captive elk and deer, to ensure that information regarding human risk is current and accurate, to maintain surveillance of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in humans, and to protect the health of the free-ranging wildlife.

The agencies are already directing substantial resources to identify the scope and magnitude of the problem. As I write this letter, efforts are underway to collect and process samples from 500 white-tailed deer in the area surrounding the town where the positives were harvested. DNR staff is working with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and local landowners, and DATCP staff is interviewing owners of captive deer and elk in the surveillance area and statewide. DATCP also is beginning the process of examining health records and enrolling the herds in a CWD monitoring program. DHFS staff is involved in responding to the concerns of hunters, meat processors, taxidermists and others.

While the initial response of the three agencies to the finding of CWD in wild deer has been emergency-based, we anticipate that this problem will be with us for a long time. CWD is not, as experience in the Western states has shown us, a short-term problem. We expect to be dealing with CWD and the collateral issues for years to come. The State of Wisconsin is hopeful that APHIS is in a position to assist us in dealing with this long-term challenge.

I have identified the needs we foresee both in the short term (next 12 months) and during the next three to five years for the three agencies:



The Honorable Ann M. Veneman

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Salary and Fringe Benefits for Project and Permanent Positions

FY02 – \$1,070,037 FY03 through FY06 – \$1,588,900 per year

Supplies and Services

FY02 – \$1,321,780 FY03 through FY06 – \$1,500,240 per year

Total Resource Needs for DATCP, DHFS and DNR

FY02 – \$2,391,817 FY03 through FY06 – \$3,089,140 per year

I have attached the specific agency requests for funds to this document.

The State of Wisconsin has taken a proactive approach to monitoring and controlling CWD and it is through those efforts that the disease was detected in our white-tailed deer herd. We now need assistance in our efforts to manage this problem.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Scott McCallum
Governor

Attachment 5

Wisconsin's thoughts on CWD Research Needs

Development of Alternative Diagnostic Tests: Current tests for CWD require killing the animal and removing the brain stem. Preparation and laboratory analysis then takes almost a week. In addition, laboratory capacity for CWD diagnosis is limited to a small number of labs around the country. Development of rapid diagnostic tests and the capacity to process many samples are needed to test the large volume of hunter-harvested deer and to quickly assure Wisconsin's hunters about the test status of their venison. In addition, development of an effective live animal test is needed for the deer and elk farmers. Better understanding of environmental contamination and the ability to reliably disinfect disease-impacted captive facilities are critical for effective regulation of Wisconsin's captive deer and elk industry.

Disease dynamics: Understanding disease dynamics in white-tailed deer is a critical, fundamental research need. There is no current research available on CWD dynamics in white-tailed deer populations – high density or otherwise. Available information on the rate at which animals become infected, the time required for infected individuals to become infectious and to develop clinical symptoms, and the time span before infected animals die must be inferred from a small body of research on other deer species (mule deer and elk). Anecdotal information suggests that progression of CWD in white-tailed deer may be quicker than in these other species. We need to understand the dynamics of CWD to understand the current risks and develop effective control strategies. Basic information is also needed on the current distribution and prevalence of CWD within Wisconsin.

Disease Transmission: Mechanics of transmission is essential knowledge needed to control the spread of CWD throughout Wisconsin's deer herd. Despite 20 years of research on western deer species, we do not have a complete understanding of transmission routes from one animal to another. Current research is addressing transmission in mule deer in Colorado and the transmission process may be similar between species of deer and elk. However, thorough understanding of the transmission process and the mechanism by which CWD spreads in Wisconsin's white-tailed deer is critical for development of effective management strategies to combat this outbreak and to prevent future outbreaks. Information is needed on the mechanism of transmission between wild and captive deer and elk. In addition, transmission of the disease from the environment (water, soil, etc.) to deer and persistence of the disease in the environment needs to be investigated to understand the long-term implications of the disease and to make informed decisions on responsible disposal of deer carcasses that hunter may not want to consume.

Population and Social Dynamics of White-tailed Deer: An understanding of the population and social dynamics of white-tailed deer in the CWD affected area is essential. The population consequences of CWD, the rate of spread, and the ability to manage the outbreak are all driven by the population and social dynamics of the host species. Available information on population consequences is limited to low-density mule deer in Northeastern Colorado and Southeastern Wyoming. The role of population density on the rate of spread of CWD needs to be known. Rates of reproduction, natural and human-caused mortality, and dispersal in eastern white-tailed deer populations are likely very different from those of Rocky Mountain mule deer. Knowledge of the movements of white-tailed deer is specific to the habitat occupied and may determine the likely rate of spread of CWD and how large an area surrounding the infected area should be included for special management. Increased understanding about the effect of CWD infection on reproductive success and on mortality from other sources (hunter-harvest, deer-vehicle accidents, predation) is needed to accurately assess the effects of CWD on white-tailed deer populations. Species-specific differences in behavior may affect the rate of transmission between individuals and the spread of the disease within and between populations. All these population dynamics data are needed to model likely impacts and spread of CWD and to develop effective strategies to combat the disease.

Social Consequences: The area of southwestern Wisconsin affected by CWD is a landscape of privately owned small farms. The effectiveness of disease management efforts will depend primarily on the cooperation and participation of local landowners and deer hunters. Stakeholder attitudes toward the seriousness of CWD, their personal long-term goals for the deer population in the area, their willingness to

cooperate and participate in disease management actions, and their perception of health risk to humans associated with venison consumption need to be known. The willingness of meat processors and taxidermists to handle deer in the infected area should also be known. Research on the human dimensions of CWD management will be critical for developing effective management strategies.

Interspecific Transmission of the CWD: Additional research is critically needed to understand the potential for CWD transmission to humans, other wildlife, and livestock. Research is underway evaluating if cattle can be infected by using the same environment or sharing food sources with infected deer. Additional current research is looking at the potential for CWD spread to humans, using primate models. Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) is the human analog of CWD. It is known to occur worldwide, and occurs in the USA at a rate of about 1/1,000,000 population, affecting primarily persons over the age of 65. A new form of this disease called new variant CJD has never been found in the USA, but has occurred in Europe, primarily in England, where the disease was presumably contracted by eating beef from cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy. New variant CJD tends to occur in much younger individuals than classic CJD. The Bureau of Communicable Diseases (BCD) of the Division of Public Health (DPH), in cooperation with the CDC, currently maintains surveillance for CJD-like disease when it occurs in persons under the age of 56. This is an effort to detect the new variant form of the disease if it ever occurs in the USA. The DPH proposes to enhance these surveillance activities by expanding them to include both forms of CJD in all ages using the following means:

- ü The Bureau of Health Information would perform surveillance of death certificates. Since CJD is invariably fatal, examination of death certificates is a fairly sensitive method of detecting potential cases. Cases in which CJD is listed as a cause of death would then be marked for follow-up investigation.
- ü Fund a fellowship within the UW Department of Neurology to perform medical chart reviews for the Bureau of Communicable Disease on possible CJD cases identified through the death certificate surveillance. This expertise in clinical neurology does not reside within the BCD. Additionally, the funded Fellow would conduct at least two seminars for interested physicians and infection control practitioners to increase awareness of the CJD surveillance system and of the disease itself.

Monitoring of the Disease Management Program: Wisconsin is planning an aggressive management program to combat CWD. Given uncertainty associated with many aspects of this disease it will be critically important to monitor changes in disease prevalence, deer populations, and human attitudes over time to assess the effectiveness of the management program and to adapt management strategies as additional knowledge is gained. Important issues include the efficiency of alternative deer population reduction strategies and the impact of deer population reductions on changes in the prevalence of the disease across time and space. It will be necessary to integrate the results of field research into computer modeling to assess the effectiveness of management actions.

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